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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine whether the "New York Times" news coverage given India between 1973 and 1980 was consistent with trends in United States foreign policy toward India during those years. The period under study was characterized by four alternating periods of tense and relaxed relations between India and the United States. All items on India from 672 issues were coded in terms of slant or tone, topic, and prominence. The results indicated that changes in length and prominence scores of items on India over the four foreign policy periods were not significant and did not parallel U.S. foreign policy toward India during that time. However, the data exhibited a pattern that sets the first four years (roughly corresponding to the relatively troublesome first three periods) apart from the last four years. In the last four years the percentage of unfavorable coverage decreased, the percentage of neutral coverage increased, the mean length and prominence of all items increased (greater attention was being paid India), and the mean length of favorably slanted items tended to be higher. And, with the unanticipated exception of unfavorably slanted items, all mean lengths indicated a shift consistent with expectations. The study defined the last four years of the period as the only period of improved relations since the 1971 low point. (HTH)

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The New York Times and Foreign Policy: Press Coverage and U.S.-India Relations, 1973-1980

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THE NEW YORK TIMES AND FOREIGN POLICY: PRESS COVERAGE AND U.S.-INDIA RELATIONS, 1973-1980

This study examines the relationship of American government policy toward India and coverage of India in a leading American newspaper, the New York Times.

The Western--particularly American--press system is typically distinguished from other systems at least partially on the basis of its reputed adversarial, "watchdog" posture (regardless of the precision and number of categories in one's typology of press systems[1] and whether one's overall criterion for discrimination is economic or political).[2]

As Pool noted, this stereotyped institutional role maintains a "powerful pull on the journalist's imagination."[3] Analyses of actual government-press relations, however, have indicated shortcomings of this model.[4] The day-to-day working relationship of government official and member of the press is more symbiotic than adversarial.[5] News production is a joint undertaking of the two institutions[6] and continued "adversarity" serves the purpose of neither.[7] In fact, some posit that an exchange model more accurately depicts the level of day-to-day cooperation, between government and press, imperative to the functioning of both institutions.[8]

Still, the adversary ideal remains, and some journalists are troubled by this chasm between normative and operative press-government relations. They are faced with the dilemma of, on the one hand, dependence on government for news (and potential "media professional-government elite integration" described by Blumler

and Gurevitch[9]) and, on the other, professional and/or personal adherence to the adversary's role.

But while one easily envisions press and government locked in combat over the governing of the nation, there are domestic issues or problems that, in principle, government and press agree upon totally (universal education, eradication of disease, etc.). A "common foe" mentality prevails.

Is there a parallel process or prevailing mentality in foreign affairs or policy matters? Does a nationalistic or "common foe" orientation appear in press coverage? How does the often necessary dependence on government information sources affect coverage of the common enemy or ally?

Studies have shown that U.S. press coverage was generally consistent with official policy toward several "common foes": Russia,[10] China,[11] and Cuba[12]--all countries with political systems radically opposed to that of the United States. This study focused on a country with a political system more similar to that of the United States: India.

The specific, operational question researched was: did news coverage given India by the New York Times between 1973 and 1980 relate to trends in U.S. foreign policy toward India in those years? Were any changes purely quantitative (i.e., were there increases or decreases in sheer volume or total inches of coverage), or were there parallel qualitative trends in coverage (i.e., were there changes in the emphasis on certain types of "positive" or "negative" news?)[13]

The New York Times was selected for study because of its ascribed role as "reference index" for other papers,[14] because it

is acknowledged as a "leading"[15] or "elite"[16] paper, and because its maintenance of a staff of overseas correspondents and subscription to multiple international wire services[17] enables it to, in fact, be a leader in the volume of foreign news it contains.[18]

The time period was chosen because it was not characterized by any drastic polarization or change (i.e., from ally to foe or vice versa) in U.S.-India relations. Instead, the 1973-1980 era was characterized by alternating periods of tense and relaxed relations, of chilling and warming of relations, of agreements and disagreements unaccompanied by major realignment; in short, the period arguably is more representative of international relations than radical reversals (e.g., recognition of the People's Republic of China, or the sudden replacement of a pro-American Cuban leader by an anti-U.S. socialist revolutionary).

These fluctuations or changes in India-U.S. relations were operationally based on careful analysis of U.S. Department of State Bulletins (the "official record" of U.S. foreign policy) and on congressional publications (reflecting, in recent years, Congress' larger role in American foreign policy).[19]

The producers of these documents seemingly characterized chilling and thawing of relations in terms of: the granting or withholding of varying levels of economic aid; cultural and other exchange agreements signed (more an indicator in their presence than in their absence); and visits of government leaders or officials between the two nations. That is, while relations between the two countries were of course intangible and often based

on either of the principals' relations with yet a third party or nation (e.g., America's policy change in response to the India-Pakistan war), state department and congressional documents used these as indicators of the comparative, varying quality of the U.S.-India relationship.

Close reading of these documents made possible the demarcation of the eight-year period (1973 to 1980 inclusive) into the following policy periods: 1973 was a year encompassing a transition, from previously "poor" relations (with the 1971 United States "tilt" toward Pakistan[20]) to "improving" Indo-American relations; January 1974 to June 1975 represented continuing, gradually improving relations; July 1975 to March 1977 (a period of Indian national "emergency," when the fundamental rights of Indian citizens were suspended) saw a reversal, a trend of declining U.S.-India relations; and, finally, April 1977 to December 1980 (a period when the decidedly pro-India Jimmy Carter was president and when democratic conditions had been restored in India) was the time of most favorable India-U.S. relations.

Admittedly, a degree of judgment is involved in interpreting these documents and arriving at conclusions about overall foreign policy. Nonetheless, these were "official" records of policy.

Based on the general research goal of examining the correspondence between policy and quantitative and qualitative measures of coverage, the following hypotheses were generated:

H_{1a} and $_{1b}$: The mean length and prominence of favorable items on India in the New York Times will change over the four foreign policy periods, consistent with changes in U.S. policy toward India.

H_{2a} and $_{2b}$: The mean length and prominence of unfavorable items on India in the New York Times will change over the four foreign policy periods, consistent with changes in U.S. policy toward India.

H_{3a} and $_{3b}$: The mean length and prominence of items on "positive" topics about India in the New York Times will change over the four foreign policy periods, consistent with changes in U.S. policy toward India.

H_{4a} and $_{4b}$: The mean length and prominence of items on "negative" topics about India in the New York Times will change over the four foreign policy periods, consistent with changes in U.S. policy toward India.

Method

The constructed week sampling technique[21] was used, with one sample week for each month in the eight-year period, creating a total sample of 672 issues. All items on India in each issue were coded in terms of slant (favorable, neutral and unfavorable); positive or negative topic (positive topics included development news, nationalism, and international relations; while negative topics included crime/violence, internal conflict, international conflict or war, disasters/accidents/poverty, and political corruption or failure); and prominence, derived from Budd's[22] technique. Intra- and inter-coder reliability checks ranged from .84 to .95, in three series of tests.[23]

Analysis of variance (across the four designated time periods) was the primary testing procedure, with t-tests used for subsequent pairwise comparisons.

Findings

The final sample numbered 653 issues of the Times, including 653 items on India.[24] Of the 653 items, 239 (36.6%) were neutral in slant. The Times carried more unfavorably (258) than favorably (156) slanted items about India and more negative topic (242) than positive topic (130) items.

Unfavorably slanted and negative topic items accounted for the greatest proportion of total inches of coded copy. However, the mean lengths for favorably slanted (13.97 inches) and positive topic items (11.82 inches) were higher than for unfavorably slanted (12.42 inches) and negative topic items (10.67 inches) respectively. The mean prominence scores for favorably slanted (2.68) and positive topic (2.45) items were also higher than for unfavorably slanted (2.43) and negative topic (2.28) items.

Coverage varied during the studied period, ranging from a high frequency of 102 items in 1974 to a low of 56 in 1978 (see Table One). No monotonic trend in Times coverage--number of items--of India could be discerned (despite another study's finding, for the same time period, a trend of increasing Times coverage of the Third World).[25] However, ns for the group of the last four years (rather favorable years in India-U.S. relations, and defined in the study as the Carter presidency period of "improved" India-U.S. relations) are smaller than the ns for (the more problematic) earlier years. Also, the percentage of unfavorably slanted items is, in general, smaller in the last four years, with the percentage of favorably slanted items remaining steady and the percentage of neutral items increasing.

Overall, mean length and mean prominence of all items were relatively larger in the last four years compared to the first four years.

When neutral (or unslanted) items and neutral topics are ignored and only the "deviant" non-neutral items and topics are considered,[26] mean prominence scores follow similar patterns: higher means in the last four years for both favorably and unfavorably slanted items and positive and negative topic items. No similar pattern was evidenced in the mean length of unfavorably slanted items and positive and negative topic items. But mean length of favorably slanted items tended to be higher, again, in the last four years.

While the data are "suggestive" when presented as annual means, recall that the hypotheses called for grouped periods of years: 1973, the transition period from poor to improving relations; January 1974 to June 1975, a period of improving relations; July 1975 to March 1977, a period of declining relations; and April 1977 to December 1980, a period of improved relations.

Several of the hypotheses used mean length as a criterion, whether mean length of favorably or unfavorably slanted items or of positive or negative topic items. Changes in each mean would parallel the changes in U.S. policy toward India.

As Table Two data indicate, none of the hypotheses using length as the criterion measure was supported (i.e., statistical nulls were retained for all length hypotheses).[27] Hence, no post hoc comparisons of means were done. Still, discussion of the

observed data may be worthwhile.

From Period 1 to Period 3, the means shifted in directions contrary to expectations. Mean lengths of favorably slanted and positive topic items decreased in Period 2 (of improving India-U.S. relations) and increased in Period 3 (of declining India-U.S. relations). And mean lengths of unfavorably slanted and negative topic items increased in Period 2 (of improving relations) and decreased in Period 3 (of declining relations). In Period 4 (of improved relations), the mean lengths of favorably slanted, positive topic, and negative topic items shifted in the expected direction, increasing for favorably slanted and positive topic items and decreasing for negative topic items. For unfavorably slanted items, the mean length increased instead of decreasing, but the difference between the mean lengths of Periods 3 and 4 was only .12.

The findings noted as running counter to expectation give one pause for reconsideration: when relations are in the process of improving, the length of unfavorably slanted and negative items increases and when relations are in the process of declining these items' length decreases? One might proffer the interpretation that improved relations are resulting in greater press attention to a country, but that the result of that attention is simply an exponential increase in the press' documented tendency to focus upon the negative![28]

Several hypotheses using prominence as the criterion were also proposed, again with the expectation that changes in each mean would parallel the changes in U.S. foreign policy toward India.

The prominence hypotheses were also not supported. While overall analyses of variance indicated change in the mean prominence of items during the four periods, this study's three specific directional comparisons revealed, for the most part, non-supportive evidence. In the four cases (all from Period 3 to 4) where significant changes were observed, they were twice in the expected direction (for favorably slanted and positive topic items) and twice in the opposite direction (for unfavorably slanted and negative topic items). As the speculation above suggested, press attention may increase but press attention to "bad news" never wanes.

Again, despite the lack of support for the hypotheses, the data are revealing. For the first three periods, changes in mean prominence of favorably slanted and positive topic items paralleled (those "contrary to expectation") changes in mean length: they decreased in Period 2 (improving relations) and increased in Period 3 (declining relations). For unfavorably slanted and negative topic items, the parallel held only for the first two periods, increasing from Period 1's transition era to Period 2's era of improving relations. In Period 3, these mean prominence scores increased as expected. In Period 4, the mean prominence of all items increased. In other words, the mean prominence began to increase in Period 3 over Period 2 for all items, and continued to increase in Period 4, with the increase being statistically significant from Period 3 to 4.

(These prominence-related findings merit a caveat: in September 1976--i.e., the latter part of Period 3--the Times changed its format from eight to six columns. As a result, the

prominence score for items with a one-column headline was "inflated" by a whole point because these items grouped with other headlines larger than one column wide.)

Discussion

Changes in mean length and prominence scores of items on India in the Times over the four foreign policy periods were not significant and did not parallel U.S. foreign policy toward India during the time. This suggests the "independence" of Times coverage of India from government policy toward India between 1973 and 1980. It also lends some credence to the contention that, in the post-Vietnam 1970s, the U.S. press severed its nationalistic "link" with government and made a more independent assessment of events.[29]

This study also contributes to the definition of "situational limits" to the operation of that "link."

The argument that an advocacy relationship exists between (a normatively adversary) press and government in some foreign policy coverage is based at once on the suspicion that ideologic nationalism can creep in and on the recognition of the press' structural dependency on government for information on foreign affairs. These factors--primarily the former--could have been operative in cases previously studied,[30] because of ideological differences between those countries and the United States, and--in terms of the dependency--because of national security concerns (e.g., if the event involved military activity).

Lacking any drastic changes in U.S. foreign policy toward India and any direct involvement (particularly of a military or antagonistic nature) of the U.S. in India between 1973 and 1980,

the "structural dependency" factor did not obtain. And of course because India is a democracy and upholds values similar to those of the U.S., the chances for the "nationalistic ideology" factor were also reduced.

But while no statistical support for the hypothesized directions was obtained, the observed yearwise and periodwise data exhibited a pattern which sets the first four years (roughly corresponding to the relatively troublesome Periods 1, 2 and 3) collectively apart from the last four years (roughly corresponding to the most favorable Period 4).

In the last four years the percentage of unfavorable coverage decreased, the percentage of neutral coverage increased, the mean length and prominence of all items increased (greater attention was being paid India), and the mean length of favorably slanted items tended to be higher. And, with the unanticipated exception of unfavorably slanted items, all mean lengths evidenced a shift consistent with expectations.

This study defined Period 4 as the only period of improved relations since the 1971 low point. The foreign policy change from Period 3 to Period 4 was likely the result of the confluence of two major events: in India, the restoration of democracy, coinciding, in the U.S., with the beginning of a very pro-India Carter presidency.

In sum then, the partitioning of the first four years of the study into three discrete foreign policy periods, though suggested by U.S. Department of State Bulletins and congressional publications, may not have been warranted.

Further, foreign policy news forms a subset of foreign affairs news. That is, news of India-U.S. relations forms only a small part of the news on India in the Times (testimony to that country's openness to Western media, as well as to the similar values and political systems that generate between-nation interest in each others' affairs). It is possible that "press follows flag" more when foreign policy news and foreign affairs news about Country X are synonymous, i.e., when coverage of Country X consists actually of coverage of U.S. policy toward that country (e.g., Cuba prior to any "thawing" in U.S.-Cuba relations). In these cases, there is arguably more potential for policy advocacy to "spill into" news columns. And at the heart of this interpretation is, of course, the structural dependency alluded to earlier.

TABLE ONE

Items About India in the New York Times,
By Slant and Topic, By Year

	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
Total Items:								
(n =)	90	102	87	86	92	56	65	75
%Favorable	30.0	17.6	21.8	29.1	21.7	26.8	17.0	28.0
%Neutral	34.4	32.4	26.4	29.1	44.6	46.4	44.6	41.3
%Unfavorable	35.6	50.0	51.7	41.9	33.7	26.8	38.5	30.7
mean length	12.2	10.8	11.8	10.9	13.1	13.8	14.8	12.3
mean prominence	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.2	3.0	2.9	2.8	2.9
Only Non-neutral Items:								
(n =)	59	69	64	61	51	30	36	44
%Favorable	46.0	26.0	30.0	41.0	39.2	50.0	30.6	48.0
mean length	13.6	8.9	10.5	14.3	12.7	17.3	23.2	15.9
mean prominence	2.4	1.9	2.1	2.5	2.9	3.4	2.9	3.6
%Unfavorable	54.0	74.0	70.0	59.0	60.8	50.0	69.4	52.0
mean length	11.7	13.8	12.7	10.8	14.1	12.5	11.5	11.0
mean prominence	2.1	2.4	2.0	2.3	3.0	2.9	2.9	2.5
Only Non-neutral Topics:								
(n =)	66	68	39	45	35	32	33	51
%Positive	52.0	26.0	33.0	42.0	25.4	47.0	8.0	37.0
mean length	11.9	8.3	12.9	10.3	7.2	16.9	5.3	15.1
mean prominence	2.2	1.7	2.2	2.5	2.3	3.5	1.7	3.2
%Negative	48.0	74.0	67.0	58.0	74.3	53.0	91.7	63.0
mean length	10.5	12.4	13.6	7.2	11.1	10.9	11.5	7.3
mean prominence	1.8	2.2	2.2	1.9	2.7	2.9	2.7	2.1

TABLE TWO

Mean Length and Prominence Score for Items About India in the New York Times, By Slant and Topic, By Period

	Period 1 (Transition)	Period 2 (Improving)	Period 3 (Declining)	Period 4 (Improved)	F	PR>F	T Values * Comparison 1 (Means 1 & 2)	Comparison 2 (Means 2 & 3)	Comparison 3 (Means 3 & 4)
Slant									
Favorable Items (n=)	27	28	34	66 (67)					
Mean Length	13.63	9.93	12.88	16.33	2.61	.053			
Mean Prominence	2.41	1.96	2.43	3.22	8.28	.00	1.29(n.s.)	-1.42(n.s.)	-3.16(sig.)
Unfavorable Items (n=)	32	66	69	89 (91)					
Mean Length	11.66	13.03	12.25	12.37	.17	.91			
Mean Prominence	2.05	2.22	2.30	2.83	5.49	.00	-0.63 (n.s.)	-0.38(n.s.)	-3.12(n.s.)
TOTAL	59	94	103	155 (158)					
Topic									
Positive Topic (n=)	34	27	23	46					
Mean Length	11.88	10.00	10.48	13.50	1.32	.27			
Mean Prominence	2.18	1.83	2.46	3.02	6.03	.00	1.09(n.s.)	-1.80(n.s.)	-1.87(sig.)
Negative Topic (n=)	32	61	41	105 (108)					
Mean Length	10.50	12.13	10.27	10.02	0.68	.57			
Mean Prominence	1.84	2.11	2.13	2.56	3.75	.01	0.96(n.s.)	-0.08(n.s.)	-2.05(n.s.)
TOTAL	66	88	64	151 (154)					

*alpha=.05.

NOTE: The numbers in parentheses refer to the n for prominence items. Items like free-standing pictures did not have length but were coded for prominence.

ENDNOTES

1
See, for example, Fred S. Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm, Four Theories of the Press (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1956); or William A. Hachten, The World News Prism (Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press, 1981).

2
Hachten's and the schema of Siebert, et al., are based on political system differentiation. For a contrast, see the economic system-based categories of J. Herbert Altschull, Agents of Power: The Role of the News Media in Human Affairs (New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 279-299.

3
Ithiel de Sola Pool, "Newsmen and Statesmen: Adversaries or Cronies?" in Aspen Notebook of Government and Media, eds. W. L. Rivers and M. J. Nyhan (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 12.

4
See, for example, Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1973); or Delmer Dunn, Public Officials and the Press (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969).

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Susan Miller, "Reporters and Congress: Living in Symbiosis," Journalism Monograph No. 53 (January 1978).

6
See, for example, Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, "News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals," American Sociological Review, 39:101-112 (1974); or Gaye Tuchman, "The Exception Proves the Rule: The Study of Routine News Practices," in Strategies for Communication Research, eds. Paul M. Hirsch, Peter V. Miller, and Gerald F. Kline (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), pp. 43-62.

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Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, "Politicians and the Press: An Essay on Role Relationships," in Handbook of Political Communication, ed. Steven H. Chaffee (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1981), pp. 467-493.

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11
Peter Han-Shan Liu, "An Analysis of the New York Times Editorial Attitude Toward the Representation of Communist China in the United Nations: 1949-56" (Master's thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1969).

12
Jeffrey A. Mills, "Editorial Reaction to the Bay of Pigs Invasion" (Master's thesis, University of Missouri, Columbia, 1969).

13
One study demonstrating Times use of "negative" news, particularly in coverage of Third World, is Daniel Riffe and Eugene F. Shaw, "Conflict and Consonance: Coverage of Third World in Two U.S. Papers," Journalism Quarterly, 59:617-626 (1982).

14
See John Dimmick, "The Gate-Keeper: An Uncertainty Theory," Journalism Monographs No. 37 (Nov. 1974).

15
Anonymous, "Nation's Editors Pick 15 'Superior' Papers," Editor and Publisher, April 20, 1960, p. 12.

16
See, for example, John C. Merrill, Global Journalism: A Survey of the Worlds's Mass Media (New York: Longman, 1983), pp. 310-311.

17
Despite industry-wide trends toward reduction of the foreign newshole and foreign news staff operations, the Times maintained its commitment to international news. See Daniel Riffe, "International News Borrowing: A Trend Analysis," Journalism Quarterly, 61:142-148 (1984).

18
For comparisons of dailies' newshole devoted to foreign news, see Vernon M. Sparkes, "The Flow of News Between Canada and the United States," Journalism Quarterly, 55:260-268 (1978).

19
See, for example, Daniel S. Cheever and H. Field Haviland, American Foreign Policy and the Separation of Powers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952); or Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, Foreign Affairs and National Division, Congress and Foreign Policy: 1974 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975).

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Howard B. Schaffer, "Review of U.S. Policy in the 1980s," U.S. Department of State Bulletin, 80:661-64 (1980).

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Robert L. Jones and Roy E. Carter, "Some Procedures for Estimating 'News Hole' in Content Analysis," Public Opinion Quarterly, 23:399-403 (1959).

22
Richard W. Budd, "Attention Score: A Device for Measuring News 'Play'," Journalism Quarterly, 41:259-262 (1964).

23
Reliability tests were done using Holsti's formula. See, Ole R. Holsti, Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1969).

24
Because the Times was on strike from August 9 to November 5, 1978, the actual sample had 653 issues instead of the planned 672 issues.

25
Riffe and Shaw, op. cit.

26
Neutrality is, after all, the norm.

27
Because of the potpourri of different topics occurring in any period and the tendency of length to vary widely depending on topic, use of length as the criterion measure resulted in a large within group variance.

28
Riffe and Shaw, op. cit.

29
See, for example, B. Rubin, International News and the American Media (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1977); or W. L. Rivers, The Other Government (New York: Universe Books, 1982); or Grossman and Rourke, op. cit.

30
Martin Kriesberg, op. cit.; Peter Han-Shan Liu, op. cit.; Jeffrey A. Mills, op. cit.